An Oral History of Miners Salary, Consumption and Risks in High Growth Miike and Chikuhô Coal Fields

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The representation of the miner is often tragic. Testimonial books such as those by Ueno Eishin (1923-1987), describe the difficult situation of miners in the coal basin during the Chikuhō crisis in the early 1960s or examine how the defeat of militant unions, particularly after the emblematic Miike strike, favored a rationalization policy that ultimately led to a decline in the living conditions of miners and increase in accidents[1]. However, one cannot reduce the world of mining to this tragic figure of the miner. The post-war mining world is also an industrial world in transition. Numerous studies point to a modernization process that began even at the beginning of the twentieth century and led to more modern forms of labor relations during the period of high growth[2].

When examing how the process of modernization impacted the life of miners, one method available to the historian is oral history. Also called “life story”, this approach was first developed in the United States, then in Europe and Japan. It is possible to give the status of truth to individual narratives. Those are given credit and legitimacy as there are compared with others testimonies, but also with other sources, statistics, regulatory texts, historical work[3]. Even if the testimonies only partially account for the complexity of the observed life courses, which are ultimately quite different from one another, they nevertheless make it possible to highlight the process of subjectivation of individuals confronted with the same economic and social changes, and also make it possible to provide detailed elements, benefiting from personal archives for example, to flesh out the historical analysis. Oral history, beyond the history of the great workers’ movements such as the history

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1 Kamata Satoshi, *Tankō “Zenkiroku”*, Tōkyō, Sōshinsha, 2007.
Allen Matthew, *Undermining the Japanese Miracle: Work and Conflict in a Coalmining Community*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994.

2 Oyama Shikitarō, « Takashima tankō ni miru Meiji zenki no oyakata seido no jittai » in *Ritsumeikan keizaigaku*, vol. 4 n° 2, June 1955.
Oyama Shikitarō « Wagakuni kōgyō (sekitan) ni okeru oyakata seido no kaitai katei », in *Ritsumeikan keizaigaku*, vol. 4, n° 3, July 1955.
Sumiya Mikio, *Nihon sekitan sangyō bunseki*, Tōkyō, Iwanami shoten, 1968.
Murakushi Nisaburō, *Nihon no dentōteki rōshikankei: tomoko seidoshi no kenkyū*, Tōkyō, Sekai shoin, 1989.
Ogino Yoshihiro, *Chikuhō tankō rōshi* kankeishi, Fukuoka, Kyūshū daigaku shuppankai, 1993.
Ichihara Hiroshi, *Tankô no rôdô shakai shi –Nihon no dentôteki rôdô shakai to chitsujo kanri*, Tôkyô, Taga shuppan, 1997.

3 Daniel Bertaux, *Le récit de vie*, Paris, Armand Colin, 2016.

of strikes, also allows us to study the economic logic of workers on a daily level. It allows us to understand various aspects of the miner's life experience, including housing and hiring. The historian practicing oral history naturally encounters certain difficulties. In our case, miners, especially Miike's, are generally asked to discuss certain major events that became part of their identity, such as the strike of 1959-1960 or the explosion of 1964. For us, however, it was important to know about their work routine and daily life.

There are no miners left today who worked in the mines before the Second World War. But we can still interview former miners who started working in the immediate postwar period. So what we have tried to identify with our interviews and this article is a moment in the social history of mining, that of the 1950s and 1960s. Other periods have been dealt with elsewhere, in particular the period of the closure of the mines and the reconversion of the mining basins, notably Naoko Shimazaki in the Jôban basin. For this purpose, during autumn and winter 2017-2018 for again in autumn 2018, we conducted interviews[4] in Omuta with three miners (Mr.Hori, Mr.Isoda, Mr.Iwai) from the now define Mitsui Miike mine and in Tagawa with two miners (Mr.Kawai, Mr.Hata) formerly employed at the Mitsubishi Shinyû and the Mitsui Tagawa mines, respectively[5]

Becoming a Man of the Mine: Hiring and Training

After the war, there was a large-scale renewal of the workforce in the mines, as the example of Mitsubishi Hashima attests. Miyachi thus shows that the miners recruited between 1945 and 1949 were most often neither miners nor peasants, but came from other trades. Peasants had no interest in leaving the countryside where there was more food than elsewhere. In the early 1950s, however, the majority were peasants. Thereaftter, the proportion of former miners and members of miners' families increased very significantly to reach two-thirds in the early 1960s[6]. The interviews we conducted seem to be in agreement with the observation of this renewal of the workforce. Mr.Hata, born in 1926, after attending a vocational school and working in an aircraft factory during the war, returned to the mine in March 1945. At that time, according to him, it was "as difficult to go back to the mine as it was to go to university." In the context of the post-war shortage, many demobilized men wanted to become miners, especially in a large mine like Mitsui Tagawa. Some were hiding their university degrees. A personal relationship enabled him to secure a job. He took care of the electrical equipment and supervised the replacement of certain materials, such as ropes and cables. A reflection of the modernization of human resources management, by the beginning of the high-speed growth era, many of those hired had attended a mine school where they received vocational training. For example, after university, Mr.Hori entered a mine school. Reflecting on his experience there, he notes, "I became a 'man of the mine' (*tankôman* 炭鉱マン) at the age of 15 and for 40 years". He was not required

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[4] The name of five miners we interviewed was changed.

[5] These interviews were made possible, on the one hand thanks to the financing of the ANR Eurasemploi, and the invitation and help we beneficied from the TUFS during the autumn and winter of 2017-2018.

[6] Miyachi Hidetoshi, « Mitsubishi hashima ni okeru rôdôsha no seikaku ni tsuite – haisen kara 1960 nendai gohan made no sekitan sangyô », *Shakai keizai shigaku*, 76-2, 8, 2010, pp.49-70.

to pay tuition and received a scholarship. After this training, in 1959, he was sent to the Mikawa pit. As he was not used to work as a pit miner, he performed various tasks on the surface, such as filling the wagons. Thereafter, he returned to the mine and took care of dynamite transportation. Mr.Iwai was recruited in a similar manner. His father, a stonemason, was killed in July 1945 while serving in Burma near the border with India. As a child, he lived with his mother who fed his family by working in the fields. She remarried in 1950 to a man who worked in the mine (tankôman) but earned a modest salary because he was handicapped and could not go down into the pit. From 1951, Mr. Iwai lived in the Nozoe shataku (housing district) near the Ariake pit. He finished high school at the age of 15 and entered the Miike mine school in 1955, where he received three years of training (half theoretical, half practical). He graduated in March 1958 and the next day was assigned to the Mikawa shaft of the Miike Mine. At the same time, he attended evening classes until graduating high school in March 1961.

While recruitment in the era of high-speed growth relied heavily on the sons of miners, a portion of the workforce worked in other trades before becoming miners. For example, Mr.Isoda, the son of a miner, failed to enter the Self-Defence Forces and worked in the Mitsui shipyards in Kobe, where he married at the age of 25 and had his first child. He returned to Miike in 1962 after becoming injured in an accident. Initially, the mine refused to recruit him because his father was a member of Miike's first union, which, at the time, was in conflict with the management. With the help of his father's younger brother, who had joined the more cooperative new union, and aunt's older brother, however, he was finally able to secure a job at Miike. At that time, one had to provide two guarantors in order to obtain employment. He started working in the mine in 1965, in Miyaura kô where he held the position of shikuri and maintained the galleries' electrical system.

After a period of renewal during the immediate postwar era, mining communities gradually stabilized during the period of high-speed growth. As the case of Mr.Isoda clearly demonstrates, interpersonal relations continued in some cases to play an important role in hiring. Playing a key role in the stabilization of mining communities was the fact that miners obtained a salary, which provided them and their families with a greater degree of economic security.

A Compensation System Characterized by Complexity

After the war, the unions demanded a wage that was more in line with the needs of the workers and succeeded in creating a compensation system that was no longer solely based on performance and included a larger fixed portion that reflected a certain socialization of wages.[7] On 14 May 1948, the Tanrô miners' union and the Sekitan kôgyô renmei coal mining employer association signed a collective wage agreement, which ended a protracted period of negotiation that began in October of

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[7] Shimanishi Tomoki, "Sumitomo Akabira tankô ni okeru birudo appu no kiketsu", in Sugiyama, Shinya (ed) *Nihon sekitan sangyô no suitai – Sengo Hokkaidô ni okeru kigyô to chiiki*, 2012.
« Rationalization, working conditions and living standards in postwar Japanese coalmining communities », *Asian Journal of German and European Studies*, Springer Open, 2018.

the previous year. This collective agreement created a general wage model in which the fixed wage portion was much higher. The preamble insists in the first sentence on a living wage (*seikatsu kyû* 生活給): “Employers, in order to rebuild the coal industry,... recognise the need to guarantee the daily lives of miners and the labour unions recognise the need to rebuild the coal industry by democratically increasing production in mining companies..... Basically, the salary that will have to be paid should be sufficient to enable workers and their families to have a decent life”[8].

However, the interviews show that in reality the economic situation remained rather precarious in the two coal basins studied until the 1960s, with wage instability linked to the daily/monthly wage system. As Mr.Iwai points out, it must first be understood that the system of remuneration used to calculate workers’ wages was heterogeneous. At Mitsui Miike, “the miners wages broken into three categories: A, B, and C. Wages obtained by performing tasks in category C (*C sagyô* C 作業) were proportional to the quantity of coal cut, or more precisely by the capacity of their team to reach a certain objective. In contrast, wages obtained by performing tasks in category B (*B sagyô* B 作業), which consisted of mine maintenance tasks like *shikuri*, corresponded less to the coal production. Lastly, wages associated with category A (*A sagyô* A 作業) were completely fixed wage regardless output. This fixed salary was not monthly, however, but daily, as it corresponded to the number of days worked”. Like Mr.Iwai, Mr. Isoda was a *shikuri* in charge of maintenance of the galleries, particular their electrical systems. He was paid a salary with a fixed portion, a portion that depended on the type of work performed, and a portion that depended on the amount of coal transported. In his case, there was little difference from month to month. There could be a difference of 10,000 yen. However, there were many days when he was unable to work because of lower back pain. Mr.Hata also notes that he was tempted to skip work because of the arduous conditions in the mine. Sometimes, despite his wife’s reproaches, he would take photographs rather than going to work.

Wage calculation was quite complex for jobs in categories B and C because the wage rate was related to the amount of coal removed. Since Mr.Iwai had worked a good part of his working life in the payroll department, he explains how his work contributed to the calculation of the salary as follows. He had to measure the amount of work provided by each working group. For each cutting area (*shakkôbu*) he had to measure, in meters, the progress of the cut and then make the calculation. He also had to take mesures for the calculation of the premiums. His observations concerned the working environment such as temperature and air quality. Should be taken into account standards, negotiated between the company and the union, on how the body can cool down at different places in the mine. In this way was calculated the working environment premium (*kankyô teate* 環境手当). In the Mikawa shaft, about 20 people were engaged in this work of collecting the information necessary to calculate the salary. Based on the information collected in the mine, the wage office calculated the wage for each work group. Within each group, the share of each person was decided according to his functional and hierarchical position. The share distributed could range from a single to double.

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[8] Henmi Shigeo, *Tankô rôdô undô no gendankai in Rôdô mondai chôsajo, Sangyô kokkan to rôdôsha kaikyû: sekitan yama o chûshin toshite*, Tôkyô, Chûô rôdô gakuen, 1949, p.252.

Depending on the days, the production, and therefore the salary, could vary enormously, with even days when there was nothing, and then days when the progress was sudden. Sometimes a team had digged too much when it should have left some for the next team. Mr.Iwai explains that the differences observed in the productivity were in the difference in difficulty between digging the upper layer (*jôdan* 上段) and the lower layer (*gedan* 下段) of the coal seam, the latter being more difficult. The wage calculation took into account the sum of the two to prevent those who had dug the upper vein from being overly advantaged. Mr.Kawai also reports that he had to work in several locations in the mine on a rotational basis because not all locations presented the same difficulty in working conditions.

This complicated calculation, which was ultimately not transparent to the workers, is consistent with observations that have been made about industrial workers in other trades and in other countries. Mistrust of wage calculation methods seems to be an integral part of working class cultures from one country to another[9]. For example, Mr.Iwai reports that one of the most difficult aspects of his job was the miners' requests for explanations for the changes in the sum they received from one month to the next. This mistrust phenomenon can be partly explained by technological developments. Mr.Kawai points out, for example, that with the development of conveyors, which tended to gradually replace transport by wagon, the miner no longer knew how much coal he had mined.

An Unstable Salary

This frustration may be all the greater in the face of the opaque nature, from the worker's point of view, of the remuneration, that it can vary very significantly from one month to the next. We studied the pay slips of two miners, one whom we interviewed, Mr.Kawai, and another, a miner in Jôban but whom we were unable to meet. We were able to reconstruct, from their pay slips, the evolution of their remuneration (graphs) over about ten years. And what we were able to observe was a fairly significant variation from one month to the next. This observation is similar to what Fuse Akiko observed over a slightly shorter period of three years[10].

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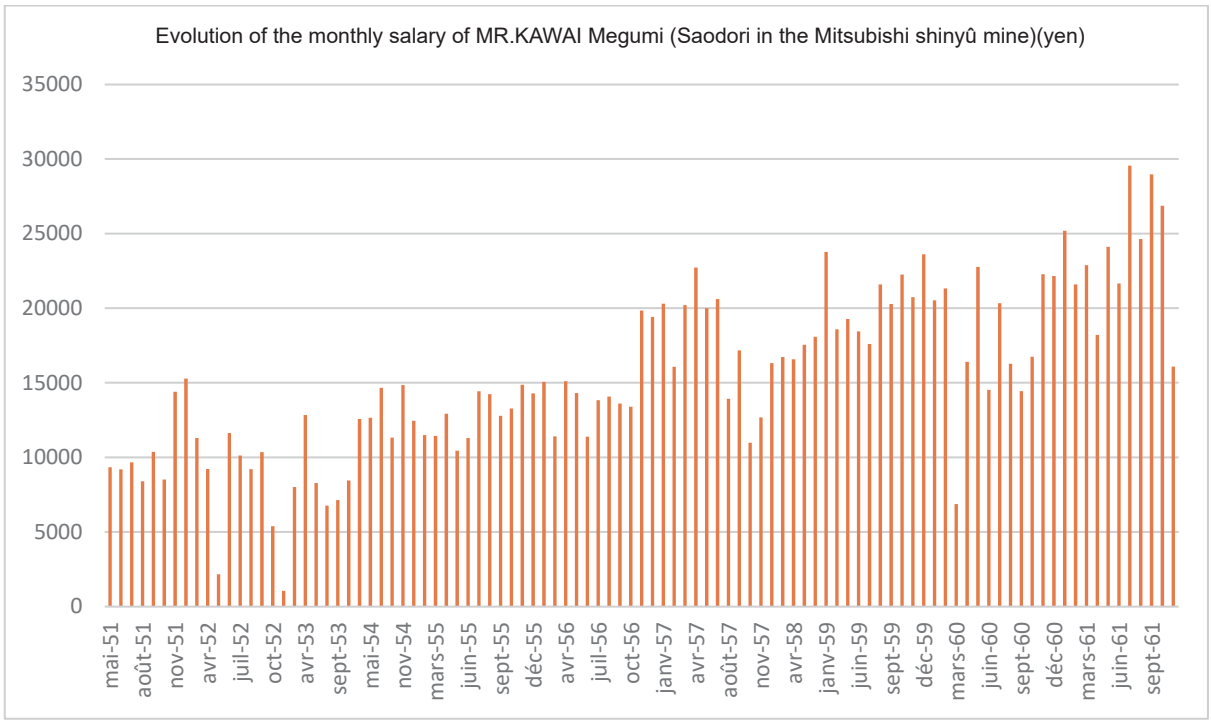
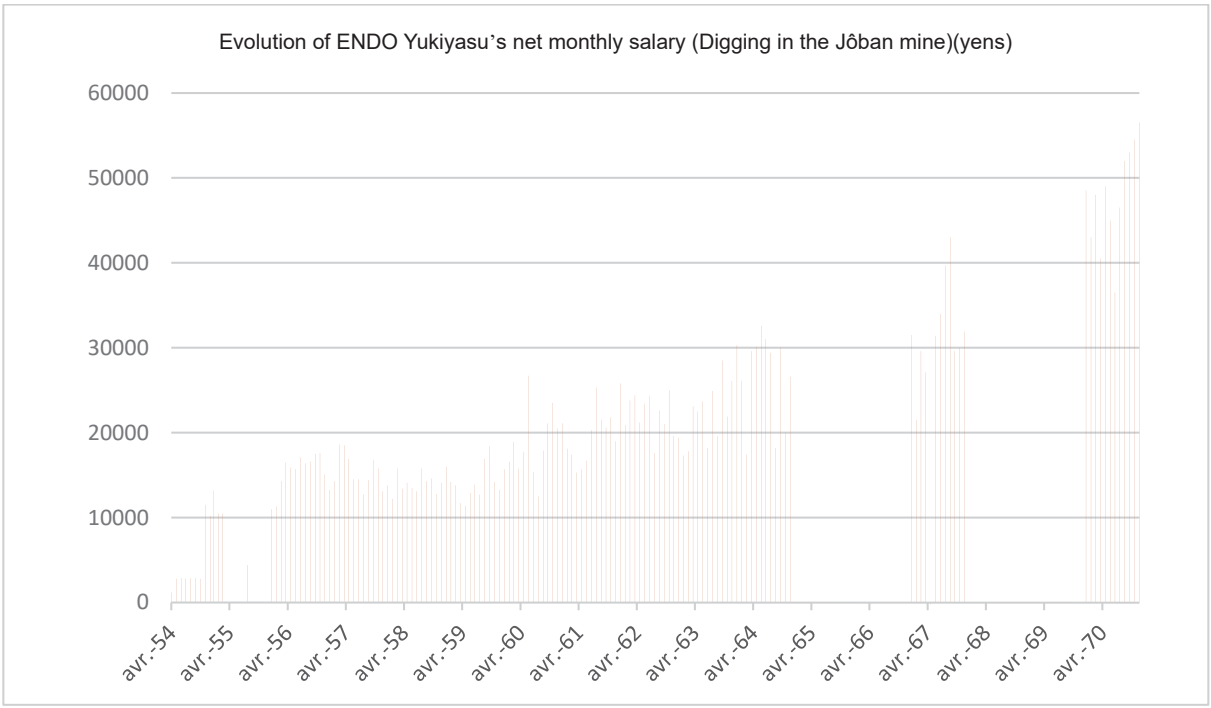
[9] Odile Macchi, 2019, "Compter comme les gens comptent : la vie de calcul des ouvrières de la bonneterie auboise pendant les Trente Glorieuses", *Les Études Sociales*, n°169, pp.48-69.

[10] Fuse Akiko, "Chinrôdôsha no rôdô – Seikatsu katei to kazoku no kôzô kinô , Tankô rôdôsha sanzô (shokuin-zô, kôin-zô, kumifu-zô) no kazoku no hikaku o chûshin to suru jisshôteki kenkyû", *Shakaigaku hyôron*, n.105, 1976, p.28.





Thanks to the interviews we were able to conduct with Mr.Kawai-and also with the other miners whose pay slips we did not get - we can explain these variations. The salary was paid monthly but it was calculated for a large part on a daily basis as we saw above. It changed every day according to production. In the case of Mr.Kawai, as for the other wagon drivers (*saodori* 棹取り), the salary depended on the amount of coal transported, moreover, when the *saodori* transported only people, he received only a fixed sum and could not benefit from the surplus which was linked to production. Above all, the salary was nil if the miner did not work. A review of pay slips and time sheets, month

by month, indicates that the number of days worked varied significantly from month to month. In some months, Mr.Kawai worked two shifts in a row several days in a month, while in the following month this was not the case. In some months, the number of days worked was lower due to a company-initiated reduction in production, illness, or even fatigue or reluctance to go down the pit, following an accident at a colleague's work site. Some months also had more overtime and night work than others. Deductions for repayment of loans or credit purchases from the company occurred irregularly. Finally, as Fuse Akiko also pointed out, strike periods meant a significant drop in pay, as strike days were unpaid. However, we could not highlight the systematic use of strike funds to compensate for the missing wages.

The existence of a double wage within the household was likely to attenuate variations in pay. However, if the male breadwinner's wage in the cities accounted for 82.5% of the household budget

on average, the proportion in the case of pit miners was 95.1%[11]. In the district of Takashima, which included the two coalmining islands of Takashima and Hashima, the labor force participation rate for women aged 15 and over stood at just 23.25% in 1965 while the labor force participation rate for men was 86.64%. While the households of miners in large mines lived mainly on a single wage, this was not always the case. For example, Mr.Hori married a caretaker whose father was a miner himself in 1967 and continued to work after the marriage. This was also the case of Mr.Isoda, whose wife worked in a company and then in a hospital. According to him, this cushioned a little the risk of a drop in income, especially in case of illness.

The Relationship with Working Time

The unstable nature of the salary was often coupled with an increase in overtime work. Meiji Hirayama coalmine archives show that it was not rare in the 1960s to find miners working three to four months in a row without a single day off, including Sunday. Indeed, according to Mr.Isoda, there was often work on Sundays, even though he did not personally work every day for a month without a single day off. This practice was known among the miners since there was a consecrated expression. It was said that there had been people who had done *mankin* 満勤 (literally "full work") on Sundays. However, he recalls that these were not necessarily voluntary strategies because "in the mine, overtime was usually forced". In addition, because it took a long time to get to the work site due to the depth of the galleries, it was usual to have 30 minutes of overtime scheduled from the beginning. This was not taken from the lunch break, but added at the end. This overtime was sometimes more than 30 minutes. These overtime hours could also be due to the difficulties of operating Japanese mines at that time. Mr.Kawai reports that the miners digging the coal wall, out of the 8 hours spent in the mine, had one hour of transport there, one hour of transport back, one hour for eating their bentô. So they worked 5 effective hours. Sometimes it was even less.

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[11] Ichihara Hiroshi, "Sengo Nihon tankô rôshi kankei no tokushitsu to 'tankô shakai' no keisei", *Keiei shigaku*, vol.27, n.3, 1992, p.2.
Ichihara Hiroshi, *Tankô norôdô shakai-shi – Nihon no dentôteki rôdô shakai to chitsujo kanri*, Tôkyô, Taga shuppan, 1997.

The situation obviously varied a lot from one job to another. For Mr.Iwai, who was *shikuri*, there was practically no overtime and no work on Sundays either. There was indeed no need to go on Sundays to calculate the salary. And once he worked for the union, there was no overtime at all. On the other hand, Mr.Kawai, as *saodori*, multiplied the overtime hours. For a team of 10 people, two drivers were needed. He often worked two shifts in a row, i.e. 16 hours. The sequence of two shifts (*renkin* 連勤) was often due to the absence of a driver in the next team. In October 1961, in one month, he worked 10 times two shifts in a row. There was no limit for such sequences for *saodori*. If a *saodori* was missing, it was absolutely necessary that another one take its place. But over these 16 hours, there were fortunately moments when there was nothing to be done because the coal was not digged continuously. Such a sequence was obviously not possible for the miners cutting the coal wall (*saitanfu* 採炭夫) because of the intensity of the physical effort. Moreover, on the coal wall, even if a miner was missing, as there were teams of 6-7, the group could still function.

The Monthly Salary as a Symbol of Social Ascension

Getting out of the daily/monthly wage, which implied a certain instability, and achieving a real monthly salary was often a goal for miners. For example, Mr.Hori found himself on sick leave in 1968. He was suffering from a heart problem (atrioventricular block), no doubt linked to the fact that he had been suffering from diphtheria, and had to undergo treatment for two years. As he could no longer work in the pit, after leaving the hospital he has been performing various tasks. From 1971, after passing an examination, he worked in the personnel department in the labour section. He became *shokuin* and depended then on the monthly salary system which will constitute for him a considerable social ascension.

For Mr.Iwai too, the ascent to a staff position was important in order to have a position with a monthly salary offering a more stable standard of living. In fact, after his hiring, as we have already seen above, he did not work in digging, he occupied until December 1960 a position as an investigator, which consisted in counting the quantity of coal extracted. Then, until December 1963, he held various positions such as shikuri (maintenance of the galleries). Then, from December 1963, he still worked as a blue-collar worker (*kôin*) at the bottom of the mine for the wages section (*chingin gakari*). He had to calculate the amount of work provided by each group. However, he realized that in the social plan of 1959 that led to the great strike of Miike, it was mostly jobs that were not directly related to digging that were cut. This fear redoubled his desire to go to university in the evening classes. In his journey to become a staff worker (*shokuin*), his integration into the “new union” [12] in 1962 was also important. In 1963, he joined the union’s wage calculation department (an important body which must be able to develop counter-expertise to that of the management in order to be able to negotiate) and remained there until 1971. In 1964, he took evening classes at a short-cycle university in Kumamoto, wishing to become a college professor. However, because of the coal industry crisis, his father-in-

[12] At the time of Miike's Great Strike of 1959-1960, which the “old union” had led, a “new union”, cooperative with the rationalization plans, was created and gradually replaced the “old union”.

law and brother lost their jobs and he abandoned his project. He continued his career in the mine with the aim of becoming a staff member and finally in 1964 he passed national exams to become *kakariin* 係員 (foreman). He became one of the leaders of the union (*kumiai senjû* 組合専従) in July 1971, proposed by a friend from the school and then from the mining school. This finally enabled him to reach the long sought-after status of monthly wage earner and to have a more comfortable income. As he had been an expert in salary calculation for many years, he participated three times a month in negotiations with management on salary calculation. He went into the pit about once every three days to inspect safety conditions. From 1977, he became director of the labor departement (*rôdô buchô* 労働部長) of the company's labor union until 1982. For the last three years, he held a position in security (*hôan*) and retired in 1994 at the age of 55.

This career path in the form of a social ascent towards the status of a monthly employee also affected Mr.Kawai. A wagon driver at the bottom of the mine since 1951, his father died in January 1961, depriving the family of part of its resources. The director of the mine offered him to become a staff member. The mine closed in 1963 and he participated as an employee in the dismantling work until 67. When the mine closed, he received a departure lump sum (*taishokukin* 退職金) of 560,000 yens. He entered then Mitsubishi material where he was employed as a driver with a regular monthly salary.

The Gradual Transformation of Living Conditions

The years of high growth are usually presented as a period of spectacular transformation of living conditions. This transformation obviously affected mining communities, but as it has been documented by a number of surveys, everyday life was still usually precarious. For exemple, from July 1947 until the 1960s, the Coal Industry Confederation (*Sekitan kôgyô renmei* 石炭鉱業連盟) took regular surveys of mining households' budgets in 50 mines across the country. What caracterized the budget of miners families, was that the share spent on housing, including water and electricity, was very low; and the engel index was hight[13]. For miners of small mines of the Chikuhô bassin that suffured from unemployement in 1955, the situation was extremely difficult. The survey of 815 miners' households that had been victims of unemployment (486 who found employment, 329 who were still unemployed) in the Chikuhô basin, carried out by the main miners' union at the time, Tanrô, and the University of Kyushu, provides an insight into the living conditions of miners in small and medium-sized mines[14]. It shows, first of all, a considerable proportion of the income spent on food and drink. This proportion reached 80% in almost half the cases. Very few cases fell below 50%. Among the miners in small mines in this period, the diet consisted mainly of rice and wheat. Some households made it with the ration officially granted to them, while others also resorted to the black market (20%). Quotas in rice distribution still existed at that time. In addition to reflecting the precariousness of the

[13] Kusuda Sekitan kôgyô, « Rôdôsha no seikatsu jitai », *Rôdô tôkei chôsa geppô*, Vol. 4, No. 4, April 1952.

[14] Chûshô tankô shitsugyôsha no shokureki to seikatsu (05/1955), archives Kyûshû sangyô rôdôkagaku kenkyûjo, 28-11, pp.182-189 (Kyûshû university archives).

lives of miners, one of the reasons for this very high proportion is the fact that miners were housed in very precarious conditions, but often free of charge. In addition, clothing costs were almost zero. Only 28% of the miners had no debts. There were many sources of loans, but many miners were indebted to acquaintances, usurious establishments such as *mujinko* 無尽講 (tontine)[15]. Two thirds of the households had already had recourse to a pawnshop (*shichiya* 質屋). The only assets of little value in these households were often pledged, i.e. women's silk kimono and obi. In 1955, it was observed that only a quarter of the families surveyed received assistance from public assistance.

The situation of the small mines of the Chikuhô basin is extreme. In larger mines a survey was conducted from August 30, 1961 to September 3, 1961 based on housewives' responses in several mining communities. One of these housewives reported that her family of five people (the father aged 41 years old and the mother 35 years old), living in company housing owned by a large operating mine, had a monthly income of 25,000 yen sand food expenditure of 12,579 yen, i.e. an Engel index of 50.3%. Housing was free, the company replaced the tatami mats every two years, the public baths were free, and electricity was free up to 35 kw. The father received 10% of his income from his wife for his personal use (cigarettes, sake, pachinko, etc.). The wife bought 5 dl of sake on payday, but the father bought it with his pocket money the rest of the time. The eldest daughter loved *kyôdô* and 3000 yens of equipment had been purchased with the bonus. For the youngest boy, 10 yens was spent in snacks on Sundays and 5 yens on ordinary days. A family at another mine had a monthly income of 38,000 yens and food expenditure of 16,500 yen, i.e. an Engel index of 43.4%. 1960, the average national Engel index stood at 41.6%[16]. However, the fact that the index in mining communities was higher than the national average does not necessarily point to a lower standard of living than the rest of the Japanese population considering that the share spent on housing was very low.

There we see a very heterogeneous situation appearing between small and medium mines and large mines, but what nevertheless emerges from the interviews we conducted with miners, all of whom came from large mines, is that the transformation of living conditions was very gradual and that the 1950s and 1960s were still characterized by a very simple life. Even though the miners were favored in the distribution of rice after the war, as the surveys cited above showed, food was a large part of the budget, and at the same time, diet remained simple. According to a 1959 survey by the Economic Planning Agency, half of the blue-collar workers ate meat or eggs only once or twice a week[17]. The miners interviewed confirm that meat consumption was extremely rare before the 1960s. Mr.Isoda ate fish and more occasionally whales. The lunch bento was garnished with dishes in soy sauce (*nitsuke* 煮付け) in particular. He didn't put fish in it because it smelled, his wife rather put eggs.

This simplicity of the living conditions was found in the housing. After the war, a lot of mines

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[15] Present in Japan from the Kamakura period, the principle of *mujinko* (or *tanomoshiko* 頼母子講) was that each member of a certain community would contribute a sum at regular intervals and would receive a single payment when their turn came or they would be in need.

[16] Imamiya Tamie, "Tankô jûtaku seikatsu chôsa hôkoku – Shokuseikatsu o chûshinto shite", *Fukuoka gakugei daigaku Kurume bunkô kyôiku kenkyûjo kenkyû kiyô*, n.12, March 1962, pp. 15-16.

[17] Economic planification agency, 1959

started massive housing building project that would modernize company housing. In January 1946, the government enacted regulations for the extraordinary building of housing for coalminers (*Rinji tanko rôdôsha jūtaku kensetsu kisoku* 臨時炭鉱労働者住宅建設規則). The plan was to build 5380 housing units in 1946 and 40,000 in 1947. In actual fact, a total of 125,121 dwellings were built through to March 1949. However, this represented just 27.3% of the 458,000 mineworkers at that time[18].

Our interviews show indeed that many miners, even from large mines, continued to live in *nagaya* of basic comfort. Mr.Hori recalls the conditions in the immediate post-war period as a child. Having a father who was a miner at the Mandakô pit, he lived in the nearby Ôtani shataku (miner's residence). Eldest of a family of five brothers and sisters, his family lives in two rooms of 6 *tatami*. There were no toilet, bath or even a private water supply. There were one water supply point for 5 dwellings, one toilet for five families and one public bath for about 8 rows of *nagaya*. The miners themselves used the company's furo. Mr.Kawai, although he himself did not live in the coron, describes similar conditions at the Shinyû Mitsubishi mine. There were no toilets or water in the dwellings. In the morning, before leaving for the pit, there was a queue in front of the communal toilets. These conditions could be found still in the 1960s. Mr.Isoda first lived with his wife's family, due to the lack of housing in the enterprise housing, but managed to move in after two requests. They live for free in a *nagaya* at the Mawatari shataku, the same as his parents. There were two rooms, 6 *tatami* and 4.4 *tatami*. In spite of the common toilets and bath, it remained in it even after the retreat. However, not all miners lived in the *shataku*. Mr.Kawai until his marriage in 1957, at the age of 27, lived with his parents, sister and grandmother outside the miner's residence, as his father was not a miner and worked in the railways. He gave them his salary and received about 10 percent as an allowance. When he married his wife, chosen as a child (*iinazuke* 許嫁) by the respective parents, he did not return to the *shataku* and continued to live with his parents to continue paying part of his salary.

If, as the case of Mr.Isoda shows, miners did not necessarily experience an improvement in their housing conditions over the course of their career, becoming an staff member (*shokuin* 職員) was nevertheless often synonymous with an improvement in housing conditions. When Mr.Hori, from 1971, after passing an exam, worked in the personnel department in the labor section, he also entered an apartment in a white-collar residence, initially free of charge, but which became chargeable for a rent of 1000 yens per month.

There is also a phenomenon of home-ownership among miners from the second half of the high growth years as Naoko Shimazaki highlighted for Taiheiyô coalmine in Kushiro[19]. In Miike,

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[18] Sugiyama Shinya, "'Keisha seisan' kôsô to shigen rôdôryoku shikin mondai", in Sugiyama Shinya, Ushijima Toshiaki (Ed.), *Nihon sekitan sangyô no suitai – Sengo Hokkaidô ni okeru kigyô to chiiki*, Tôkyô, Keiô gijukudaigaku shuppankai, 2012, pp. 79–84.

[19] Naoko Shimazaki, Transformation of the company system and birth of the "white-collar" miner: the case of progressive company Taiheiyo Coalmine during the period of economic growth in Japan, *Asian Journal of German and European Studies*, 3(9) 8, 2018.

Mr.Isoda's parents built a house in 1965 at the time of the father's retirement and with the help of the money received on that occasion (*taishokukin*). The purchase of a house could also be a way of taking care of the miners parents. Mr.Iwai bought a house in 1977. Indeed, his father-in-law then retired and could no longer live in the company housing and therefore began to live in this new house.

A Culture of Mass Consumption Gradually Takes Hold in the Mines

The consumption patterns of miners can be found in the pay rolls we were able to consult. The development of the social state after the war, paternalistic policies and trade unionism implied that deductions were numerous. For example, on Mr.Kawai's pay slips, taxes were deducted at source (local and income taxes), as well as social insurance contributions, union dues, housing and energy costs (gas and electricity) or even a contribution for the maintenance of the Shinto temple dedicated to the mountain gods (protectors of the miners). In fact, once these deductions had been made at source, food purchased and some entertainment expenses made, according to Mr.Isoda there was nothing left at the end of the month. This could be embarrassing if there was a small drop in salary. While he was a resident of a Miike nagaya, he did not have enough money to buy a television. Only a few people had one. He felt that the miners digging the coal (*saitanfu* 採炭夫) and those drilling the galleries (*kusshin* 掘進), whose wages depended on production targets, had a television because of their higher wages. This is confirmed by Mr.Iwai. When Mr.Iwai received his salary in cash on the 15th of the month, he immediately put it in envelopes that corresponded to the main lines of expenditure : food, rice (*komedai* 米代), miso (*misodai* 味噌代), accompaniment (*okazudai* おかず代)...for the month. There was no envelope for savings, there was nothing left. As the salary was low, there was just enough to eat, housing was free. He organized himself this way so that he didn't have to borrow money, which he had always hated, since he was poor as a child. Nevertheless, since there could be some surplus after distributing the money in the envelopes for planned expenses, there could be irregular expenses such as replacing the children's worn-out clothes. He did not ask his wife for pocket money. He considers that until the early 1970s it was hard and that « it took about ten years for the growth of the olympics to reach Miike ». By 1963, however, he had bought a small black and white television. He had bought it in cash because he hated debt. He only went into debt for the house he bought in 1977 for the price of 670,000 yens (without the price of the land). With the savings plan of the trade union mutual insurance company (*Rôdô kinkô* 労働金庫), if one saved 200,000 yens one could borrow up to 2 million yens.

In the case of Mr.Kawai, all purchases of a fairly large price required a loan from the company, the repayment of which was directly deducted by the company, and therefore appeared on his pay slip. Between February 1955 and October 1956, he repaid a loan of 35400 yens which corresponded to the purchase of a suit. If the miners wanted to benefit from a loan from the company, they had to buy in stores with which the mine had an agreement. We also see the monthly repayment of 2100 yens of a loan from September 1958. During the interview, Mr.Kawai believes that since it appears a little before his marriage, it may be the purchase of a chest of drawers for clothes. In 1961, the repayment in 19 times of a loan (*geppu* 月賦) of 79100 yens appears on his pay slip : the purchase of a Yamaha

motorcycle of about 120,000 yens. He had therefore borrowed about 2/3 of it. At the beginning of the 1960s, no miners still had cars.

Despite their still very limited purchasing power, miners nevertheless spent part of their wages on leisure activities and even on some luxury purchases. Just after the war, according to Mr.Hata, miners' consumption desires focused particularly on American cigarettes, especially Camels, « whose good smell is recognizable from afar ». But since the price was three times higher than Japanese cigarettes, it was often out of reach for minors. In fact, a significant part of the salary was spent on drinking outings, or even sometimes with prostitutes. According to him it was "300 yens for a tea", and "500 yens to spend the night". He recalls that prostitution around the mines was very common and quite closely supervised by the authorities, with a medical visit twice a week. It was especially in the first five years after the war that there was a lot of prostitution, which may reflect the difficult financial situation of many women in those years. However, his main hobby was photography. He has been interested in photography since the age of 10. During the war he first had a camera made of cardboard, the metal being reserved for armaments-related industries. Just after the war, he even followed a photography training for 3 years and a half. He bought his first real camera in 1955, the equivalent of 3 months salary. He made this purchase without the agreement of his wife who was angry with him. Thanks to his skills, he became the photographer of the union from 1955. He took pictures of the demonstration against the rationalization of the mining industry, which "gathered 70,000 demonstrators" that took place in Tokyo in 1962. He also worked for the boss and photographed his visits to the pit. He bought other cameras that were worth more than two months' salary. The cameras at that time were extremely luxurious objects. He also spent a lot of money to buy film, a roll of film was worth two days' worth of food. Luckily, thanks to an acquaintance of his, he went to the hospital to get X-ray films. This passion was to become a salary supplement. When he finished his work in the mine at 3pm, he went then do a small job at the photographer's house. At 2 to 3 yens a picture, he made wedding pictures but also often called to photograph dead people, often children who died in infancy, family tragedy still commun at that time.

Mr.Isoda often went to the bar with his friends, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. He would take part of the salary, paid in cash on the 15th, before giving it to his wife, to meet this need. He went much more occasionally to horse or boat races but did not go to the movies. Like Mr.Hata, he loved photography since he was a teenager, being a member of the high school photo club (*shashinbu* 写真部). His father had already given him a camera. He started playing golf in 1977, but at that time golf was not that expensive. The trips were not numerous but could occur on certain occasions. For example, Mr.Kawai went on a three-day honeymoon.

Risking Life and Limb in the Mines

Trying to enter into the mental realm of the miners of the first three decades of the post-war period also means realizing the presence of a certain number of risks that reinforce the economic uncertainty that was seen with wages. An economic risk that can be seen in Mr.Kawai's pay slips. For example, strikes result in a drop in income as noted above. In Miike, the interviewed miners could't

fail to mention the great strike of 1959-1960. For example, Mr.Hori occupied the Mikawa site (from January) with about 300 other miners until the end of the strike.

The miners lived through strikes but also, of course, unemployment. Unemployment was massive in some mining areas in the aftermath of the Korean War. It was even more so in the Chikuhô of the second half of the 1950s, after the beginning of the national plan for rationalization of coal mining, with particularly disastrous consequences on the lives of miners in small and medium-sized mines, as shown by the 1955 survey we mentioned above. If, in the Chikuhô basin, unemployment was often the result of the closure of the mines, in Miike it may also be the result of reduction of the work force that the rationalization policies under the 1955 plan also implied. Mr.Hori's father was one of those who lost his job in 1959 with the rationalization plan that provoked the great strike. He was about 50 years old at the time and could not yet receive the retirement pension which started at 55. He had to make do with the retirement lump sum but also to benefit from family solidarity, Mr.Hori being the only one working in the family at the time.

Accidents were also an economic risk factor, all the more so as they were on the increase in the 1960s. Mechanization, but also lay-off plan that cut the number of miners, had a huge impact on a labor intensification that drove up the rate of accidents. A 1967 article in the Journal of Labor Sciences (*Rôdô no kagaku* 労働の科学) reported that the rate of fatal accidents in large mines had risen from 3.89 per million working days (man shift) in 1958 to 11.4 in the 1962-1965 period. The article's author put it that if Japan's coalmines were especially dangerous because of the tertiary seams, it is social and economic conditions that were the main reason for the high rate of accidents with working time often exceeding ten hours, rapid mechanization, work intensification, handling of heavy materials such as steel pillars, growing outsourcing and low pay[20]. Under these circumstances, awareness of the danger in daily life was high among the miners interviewed. For Mr.Hata, the miners saw many accidents happening around them and the temptation not to return the next day was often strong. This was often discussed among friends and colleagues : « we wanted to stop but we couldn't... ». He repeated also several times during the interview : « sekitan sangyô dôshite sonna kitanai shigoto de kurishii tankô yaru... » (coal mining, why did we have to do such dirty work, with so much suffering…). Personally, he was the victim of three accidents during his career. As he was in charge of the electrical network, he was electrocuted three times. He was even once victim of a cardiac arrest at the age of 32 when he received a 3300 volt shock. According to Mr.Isoda, in order to avoid accidents, one had to be careful with numbers. One avoided the 4 (shi, the homonym of death) and the 9 (ku as in "kurushii", suffering). These superstitions echoed the superstitions described and illustrated by the miner painter Yamamoto Sakubei, such as seeing crows in the morning or the smoke from chimneys crossing each other. Mr.Kawai says that it was the presence of crows around the large chimneys of the mine that was a bad omen. It was necessary to greet his wife in the morning before leaving for the pit, even if they had quarreled because they did not know if he was going to come back. He escaped the explosion of December 21, 1959, which killed 24 people, not being in one of the three teams

[20] Fujimoto Takeshi, "Saikin ni okeru tankô rôdô saigai", *Rôdô kagaku*, Vol. 43, No. 5, 1967, pp. 273–297.

present in the mine at that time. The danger did not come only from the explosions, but also from the multitude of small accidents at work which only concerned one or a few miners.

Mr.Isoda had an accident in November 1974. He was seriously injured at the knee ligaments, wedged between the wagons. It was a very classic accident that we regularly find in the work accident reports that we were able to consult for the Meiji Hirayama mine[21]. The security department (*hôanbu* 保安部) in the mine took him by car to the hospital where he spent 8 months in rehabilitation. The company did not allow him to work in the mine anymore. He then had to take early retirement at the age of 52. He applied for unemployment and employees of the employment office remembered him and offered him a training course in building work.

Following his accident, Mr.Isoda received a disability benefit (*shôgai teate* 障害手当). The problem was that his degree of disability was only recognized at levels 6 and 7, out of the 14 existing levels, which corresponded to a work disability resulting from the accident of 67% and 56%. This recognition only at this level left him with a bitter taste because it did not allow him to have a disability booklet (*shôgai techô* 障害手帳) recognizing permanent after-effects and a permanent disability pension. The labor inspection office could not give him a favorable opinion because of what the doctor had written when he examined him. This sense of bitterness was also reflected in his observation that no attention was paid to the safety of the minors because they were « considered uneducated ». According to Mr.Isoda again, the company's cynicism was also illustrated by the fact that non-regular miners, who were even more economically insecure, were sent to dangerous places.

Mr.Isoda's testimony shows the complicated process of recognizing the level of disability that determines compensation, which could plunge the miner into economic hardship and create lasting frustration. Indeed, it was a process over which the worker had little control. The accident report was written by the safety officer who determined the circumstances of the accident. Mr.Isoda says he did not see this report. Mr.Iwai confirmed to us that it was not the miner who made the request for an accident at work, but the personnel department. The more or less serious accidents that punctuated the life of the mining community increased a general feeling of precariousness. Mr.Iwai thus relates that his job within the union was difficult, especially during accidents. He has a particularly painful memory of the accident at the Ariake it on January 18, 1984, which killed 84 people. He remembers that he had to announce the deaths to the families of the accident circumstances when there were 20 centimeters of snow.

Two miners evoke the safety weeks (*anzen shûkan* 安全週間). Mr.Kawai took part in them in spring and autumn, which allowed him two days off. Mr.Hata also evokes the safety weeks. But for him it was only propaganda and posters. According to him, there was no real policy to improve security linked to these campaigns. The accident reduction figures given by the management on these occasions to show the results of these campaigns were, according to him, a lie (*komakashi*). As Mr.Hata points out, campaigns for safety at work were not always up to the challenge. This is true for occupational accidents but also for occupational diseases.

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[21] Sengo tankô keiei shiryô Meiji Hirayama 6871-6880 (Kyushu university archives).

In the large mines, there were regular medical check-ups. Mr.Kawai confirms that at Mitsubishi Shinyû, he had a medical visit twice a year. But many illnesses were poorly treated. Mr.Isoda's testimony shows, for example, that muscular skeletal disorders were not recognized. He often had low back pain, which prevented him from going to work on certain days and therefore deprived him of a day's pay. In this case he usually went to the hospital, which sent a certificate to the company. Such a condition was considered a private illness and the miner was entitled to three days at 60% pay from the company. After three day it was the regular employee health insurance (*kenkô hoken* 健康保険) which took over with 60% of the salary and not the work accident insurance (*rôsai hoken* 労災保険) which would have permitted him to receive 80%.

The most dangerous occupational disease, however, was pneumoconiosis, caused by the inhalation of coal dust and silica. Although it was legislated in 1955 and again in 1960, the increasing number of lawsuits in most of Japan's coalfields from the 1980s onwards shows that many cases were ignored[22]. Pneumoconiosis is nevertheless present in the background of some of the stories. Mr.Iwai married in 1966 the daughter of a foreman who died of silicosis. For Mr.Hata, the miner often heard about silicosis. Personally, he was not afraid of it thanks to his position, which he considered unexposed. Nevertheless, he knew that some people had caught it and knew that there was no cure. Several of his friends died from it. Some died or could no longer work past their thirties. The word used was "lung disease" (*haibyô* 肺病), but not "silicosis" (*keihai* 珪肺), a term mainly reserved for doctors. In Mitsui Tagawa, there were two medical visits per year to detect silicosis. In an ambulent laboratory. But he remembers that for the company, it was normal in the mine to catch silicosis.

Mr.Isoda was also aware that there were cases of silicosis in the mine, even though his father had not told him about it, which shows that talking about the disease could be considered taboo. He heard that the miners spoke very loosely of a « pain » (*taiwarui* 体悪い) to evoke those who were affected. However, since at the time he worked in the mine, as there had been the great explosion of 1964, "there had many people who were not healthy, so we didn't look very far..."[23]. Silicosis could also be minimized in some stories. Thus Mr.Kawai reports that it was generally said that there is no silicosis among the miners digging the coal wall (*saitanfu*) but only among the miners in charge of digging the galleries (*kusshinfu*). In fact, according to him, pneumoconiosis was very rarely mentioned among miners, but one hears about it indirectly. He mainly heard about it in 1961, when he became a company driver and when the mine officials went to visit the sick and brought it up when he was driving.

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[22] Bernard Thomann, « From Coal Miners to Pneumoconiosis Victims: Recognition Processes of Occupational Diseases and Shifting Labor Identities », *Procedings of the Consortium for Asian and African Studies (CAAS) Symposium,"Crossing the Boundaries: Asians and Africans on the Move" ILCAA*, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan, 2017.
Bernard Thomann, « Les victimes invisibles de la pneumoconiose dans les mines de charbon au Japon », in Judith Rainhorn (ed.), Santé et travail à la mine, XIXe-XXIe siècles, Lille, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2014, pp.151-171.

[23] To understand the place taken by the claim of recognition for the victims of the explosion of the Mikawa shaft in 1964 : Tanaka Tomoko, *Miike Tankō Tanjin Bakuhatsu Jiko ni Miru Saigai Fukushi no Shiza*. Bukkyō Daigaku, 2012.

Conclusion

In all the interviews we conducted, what struck us was both a nostalgic discourse about their life outside and inside the mine, but also an uncompromising discourse about working conditions. Through their uncompromising discourse, they provide a testimony that nuances the decades following the Second World War, which are the subject of a kind of collective nostalgia, as evidenced by the large number of books, both scientific and general public, that have been published recently[24].

Their somewhat paradoxical discourse may also reflect the experience of high growth in the mines. Despite the paternalistic policies of the big mining companies after the war and the strengthening of the social state aimed at getting the blue-collar workers out of their proletarian conditions and including the whole population in a broad middle class, the difficulties faced by the coal industry from the 1950s onwards kept the miners in a certain economic precariousness. Furthermore, these testimonies reveal a working-class lifestyle, but also a sense of belonging, that seems to resist the phenomenon of standardization that characterized the enlargement of the middle class during the period of high growth. As Hoggard noted for Great Britain in the 1950s, the opposition between “us” and “them” expressed by working class members, shows a resistance of social stratification in self representations, even in social contexts exposed to intense cultural standardisation[25], and, in the case of our former miners, despite the fact that coal industry disappeared of their living place decades ago.

But at the same time, with the discourse they hold for their visitors, they participate in the process of patrimonialization which has been underway for a number of years. The memory of life in and outside the mine is a resource for these communities that have been affected by severe decline. If these miners have agreed to speak to us, through museums like the one in Tagawa, or through the Omuta municipal government, it is because they see themselves as the spokespersons of this heritage. As such, they try paradoxaly, and perhaps unconsciously, to overcome this class opposition between “us” and “them” still present in their testimonies, and to bring the memory of workers’ labor conditions and lifestyles into the commun culture of our contemporary post-industrial world.

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[24] Kokuritsu rekishi minzoku hakubutsukan, *Kôdô keizai seichô to seikatsu kakumei*, Tôkyô, Yoshikawa kôbunkan, 2010.

[25] Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of literacy, aspects of working-class life, with special references to publications and entertainments*, London, Chatto and windus, 1957.

三池・筑豊の高度成長期の炭鉱労働者の給与・消費・リスクのオーラル・ヒストリー

ベルナール・トマン

キーワード：オーラル・ヒストリー、炭鉱、給与、消費、リスク

戦後の炭鉱は、転換期にある産業である。歴史家が近代化のプロセスの矛盾の中で炭鉱労働者がどのように生きてきたかを理解するために利用できる方法の一つがオーラル・ヒストリーである。たとえ元炭鉱夫証言が、観察されたライフコースの複雑さを部分的にしか説明していないとしても、同じ経済的・社会的変化に直面した個人の主観化のプロセスを浮き彫りにすることは可能である。この目的のために、2017-2018 年秋から 2018 年冬にかけて、大牟田では三井三池旧炭鉱の炭鉱労働者 3 名へのインタビューを、田川では三菱信友と三井田川で働いていた元鉱山労働者 2 名へのインタビューを実施した。行ったインタビューの中で印象的だったのは、炭鉱の生活についての懐古的な言説と、労働条件についての妥協のない言説の両方であった。このやや逆説的な言説は、鉱山での高度成長の経験を反映しているのかもしれない。